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Peronists Win Local Victory In Argentina

The Argentine government of President Maria Estela Peron won a modest victory when it captured the governorship of Misiones Province in an election last Sunday. It was the first test at the polls since Juan Peron's election in September 1973.

The most encouraging sign for Mrs. Peron's supporters was the severe defeat suffered by a splinter left-wing Peronist party backed by the Montonero guerrillas. Extreme leftist Peronists will, however, point to the drubbing as justification for their campaign of violence.

The strong showing of the centrist opposition Radical Party—which finished a close second—probably owed much to a substantial protest vote against the government's policies and a backlash against massive vote-buying by Social Welfare Minister Lopez Rega, who blatantly handed out millions of pesos in "subsidies" prior to the balloting.

Radical gains will enhance the position of party leader Balbin, who has been under fire from within his party for not taking a harder line.

The outcome of the Misiones vote may well serve temporarily to restrain conservative critics of Lopez Rega within the Peronist labor movement and the military. Some of them will grudgingly admit that the strategy of the President's chief adviser worked to contain the challenge from the dissident Peronist left even if it did so at the expense of losing votes to the Radicals.

There is at least a fair chance that the government success will strengthen the hand of moderates such as Interior Minister Rocamora, who have encouraged the President to adopt a more conciliatory approach in dealing with other political parties.

Rocamora is a staunch advocate of close cooperation with opposition party leaders and has urged Mrs. Peron to hold elections in provinces that have been put under direct central government control. There is no assurance, however, that voices of moderation will be heeded by Mrs. Peron as long as Lopez Rega retains his dominant influence.

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